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Non-Western Encounters with Democratization

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Chapter 9

Enough to Get By?: A Discussion of China's Minimum Livelihood Guarantee as Social Stability Mechanism

Daniel R. Hammond

In the weeks and months which followed the series of uprisings which came to be known as the Arab Spring the attention of news media and some political analysts shifted to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Discussions of the overthrow of one collection of authoritarian regimes quickly developed to include the Chinese case. Following the seismic events in Tunisia and Egypt calls appeared online for protests to be organized nationwide in the PRC. Almost as quickly as these calls for protest appeared they were snuffed out by a significant mobilization of Chinese state security resources. The Jasmine Revolution in China died before it had really begun.

Whilst media interest in the story quickly waned there has been some effort to address what occurred amongst the Chinese studies community (Dickson, 2011, Swartz, 2011). The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to discuss some of reasons put forward regarding the lack of a revolt in China. This includes the control of social media and online content in China, the nature of the initial call to revolt, the role of the military and paramilitary organizations in China, the quirks of regime legitimacy and protest in the PRC, and differences in the profile of population compared to other areas which did experience uprisings. Second, to highlight an area which has, to date, not been covered satisfactorily in the discussion of why the proposed protests fell so flat. This is the extensive work put into establishing a social assistance system, first in urban areas but subsequently in rural areas, which provides a chunk of the population with a guaranteed basic income. The programme this chapter will take a particular interest in is the Minimum Livelihood Guarantee system (*zuidi shenghuo baozhang*, MLG or *dibao* hereafter) because it is the main programme for delivering social assistance in the PRC. This chapter

will argue that the work of the central government to establish the MLG was very clearly based on a concern, still on-going, that deprivation in urban areas could lead to significant problems. In addition, the attention the government has paid to the programme demonstrates its capacity to be used as a tool to head off potential disquiet amongst a section of the population who could prove antagonistic. The discussion which follows will also engage with some of the questions this collection seeks to address: In the Arab Spring and Jasmine revolt who attempted to mobilize the protests? What were the demands of the protests? And, finally, the question of why did the Arab Spring arguably succeed but the Jasmine revolt did not? It is to this latter question that the chapter makes the main contribution.

To this end the chapter is structured as follows. First, some assumptions regarding the broad causes of the Arab Spring will be put forward. This serves to frame the discussion which follows regarding China. This is followed by a brief discussion of the actual events surrounding China's so-called revolt and the questions it raises. Third, the chapter will discuss some of the general explanations which have been suggested regarding the Chinese case. Finally, the MLG is introduced and the role of social assistance as a mechanism of social control is discussed and assessed as an additional explanation as to the lack of protests.

Some Assumptions Regarding the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring has been presented as the result of decades of frustration with corrupt, unresponsive, authoritarian regimes meshing with disillusionment, economic hardship and access to new forms of technology which aid communication and organization. Across different countries ill-feeling towards the existing regimes manifested itself in street protests, online organization, and the bringing together of disparate interests into one movement. Facing different degrees of opposition from the incumbent regimes these protests have either successfully brought down seemingly embedded regimes, for example in Tunisia and Egypt, found themselves successful in a civil conflict, Libya, or, as is the case in many more countries, continue to fight, protest and resist. Despite the major developments which have already occurred, the Arab Spring should not be considered finished. In many places the transition from one regime to a new one is still on-going and in others the initial outbreak of protest has not been resolved one way or the other. What is absolutely clear is that the events of 2011 and 2012 have redefined the make-up of North Africa and the Middle East.

Four themes emerge when discussion turns to the causes of the protests which occurred in these countries. A consistent point raised in analysis of the Arab Spring was the view of the existing regime as corrupt, unresponsive, and authoritarian in how it governed. The view that each regime undermined itself through a lack of capacity or political will to address the needs and desires of the population they deigned to govern was compounded by perceived rampant corruption. The inability, or unwillingness, of the existing regimes to address the concerns of a populace growing increasingly agitated was exacerbated by the capacity of individuals associated with these regimes to happily enrich themselves at the expense of the majority (Rodrik, 2011). How the elite leadership in a given regime are perceived when it comes to dealing with the corruption, which appears inevitable in authoritarian regimes, is significant.

Second, the population in many of the states which experienced protests and uprisings during the Arab Spring tended toward a youthful bulge (UNDESA, 2011). In and of itself this is not significant but the demography becomes important when considered in tandem with the third point, poor economic performance and increasing economic pressures. The youthful nature of the population in countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Libya combined with poor economic performance to produce a swell in youth unemployment, put at around 20 per cent across the region and as high as 30 per cent in Libya (Mason, 2012). This phenomenon has not just affected so called NEETs (not in employment, education or training) but also a growing number of graduates who, whilst highly educated, were unable to find work (Mason, 2012). Levels of overall unemployment in the region were also high: Egypt 9.4 per cent, Tunisia 14.2 per cent, Syria 8.4 per cent for example (World-Bank, 2012).

Combining a large number of unemployed individuals with the increasingly challenging economic environment, notably the increasing prices for basic foodstuffs from 2007 and the aftershocks of the global financial crisis, created the volatile mix which exploded in 2011. The final theme was the perceived use of online means to communicate and facilitate protest. This area is open to more interpretation because of the different online cultures that exist. The prominence of the use, at least in part, of social media to communicate with other protesters and the international community should not be ignored. The idea that social networking sites and micro blogging could be used to facilitate protest was not new before the Arab Spring, but the application and the location that it occurred was.

The Revolt Which Did Not Happen: China's Jasmine Revolution

China did share some of the tensions outlined above. Not least there have been losers in China's rush to achieving growth since the 1980s and this has led to a build-up of ill feeling which is often expressed in some form of protest. The criticisms of the Arab regimes as corrupt and distant could be applied to China, as could concerns about unemployment and also excitement about the potential of the internet. There is a significant difference though, as set out in detail below, and this is that the source of potential unrest was arguably older than in those countries affected by the Arab Spring and it had already been placated or tranquilized (Solinger, 2008, p. 38) by China's system of social assistance.

As a consequence the year 2011 will be significant, but not because of a revolution in China. Rather 2011 marked the centenary of the *xinhai geming* of 1911 which saw the overthrow of the Qing dynasty, the end of Imperial rule in China, and ushered in close to forty years of civil strife, invasion and ultimately a second revolution. History will, however, record that 2011 did not mark China's next revolution after 1911, 1949, the Cultural Revolution and arguably the upheavals of reform and opening. Rather the events of the first few months of 2011 will in all likelihood either serve as a postscript to Tiananmen or as the precursor to some as yet unforeseen upheaval.

Protest is not something new to China, there is a long history of peasant rebellion going back centuries, the nationalist protests of students and reformers after 1911, the revolutionary nature of the Communist regime itself, and also the numerous times Tiananmen has become the centre for student protests. Protests regarding the contested territorial claims on the Diaoyu Islands show that even during a year when sensitive political developments took place the Chinese state can tolerate demonstrations. What was different about the call for a Jasmine Revolution in China was how it initially manifested itself, the swift and overwhelming response from the state and the fact that it subsequently disappeared without trace. The aftershock of the Arab Spring introduced a possible challenge to the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) which was driven by external events and organization as much as by internal participation.

The actual details of the Chinese non-revolution have been extensively documented in the media and by some China scholars who wrote pieces soon after it became apparent that the PRC would not experience a similar upheaval. Patricia Thornton provides a comprehensive account of

developments in China during February 2011 in her contribution to this book, and it would serve little purpose to repeat details here.¹ The question to consider is why, despite efforts to organize protests in China, they came to nothing. As Thornton shows the original calls to protest focused on a wide range of social, economic and political issues which might be expected to have galvanized some Chinese citizens to protest. This was not the case and in the end China did not become a new front in the story of uprising and overthrow in 2011.

Events elsewhere quickly escalated and distracted the attention of the international media. The non-protests of China paled in significance against the first rumblings of civil war in Libya and Syria. What was left behind was a small number of arrests, another blow struck against those campaigning for better human rights in China and the tricky task of explaining why something which did not happen, did not happen.

Explanations

There are a number of explanations as to why the Jasmine Revolution did not spread to China. The most obvious is related to where the call to protest originated. There is a consensus that the anonymous calls to protest originated outside of China (Chang, 2011; Coghlan, 2011). Here is a first major difference with the protests of the Arab Spring and China; the calls to protest did not originate within China. This is important because not only the legitimacy but also the impetus to organize and protest would have been weakened by the lack of a foundation within China which was actively involved in the nascent protest movement.

Another point is that the tight control of online media and social media in China was and remains more extensive and well developed than, arguably, anywhere else in the world. The complex interaction of state censors and monitors, self-censorship and technological controls means that the use of the internet to mobilize, organize and disseminate information is very difficult in China. Very quickly after the initial calls to protest appeared, the Chinese state's mechanisms to control information set to work. News on what was occurring in Egypt and other countries was limited and made no mention of the protests or collapse of regimes. In addition specific words and phrases were reported as being

¹ See Chapter 8.

blocked in internet searches. These included: 'Egypt', 'Cairo' (Rodrik, 2011; Swartz, 2011), 'Wangfujing', 'jasmine', and even 'today' and 'Sunday' (Branigan, 2011, Dickson, 2011, Swartz, 2011). In addition some text messaging services were disabled in cities which were the target of proposed protests (Chang, 2011). Overall the lockdown on internet communication and information distribution would have made it very difficult for protesters to organize coherently.

The difficulty of organising is not unique to the online world in China, as extensive controls also exist regarding non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For an outsider observing the developments which occurred during the Arab Spring, particularly the Egyptian case, one point which was striking in its contrast to China was the existence of organizations which could mobilize to participate and to take advantage of the protests as they began to coalesce into a mass movement. Whilst it may reflect a lack of understanding to overstate their importance these organizations, whether religious, labour or student oriented, provided a structure around which the protests could organize and operate. Controls in China, implemented and amended since 1989, work to ensure that any emerging social organization is co-opted by the state, normally through a supervisory relationship, subjected to extensive administrative controls and, in this context most significantly, cannot organize in any way at a national level. It goes without saying that these organizations, when they are allowed to exist, cannot actively oppose the Party-state.

Another significant difference between China and especially the Egyptian case was the role played by the military. Ultimately the military stood to one side and allowed protests to occur to the point of regime collapse. In China the military did not need to get involved because the regular security forces managed to contain the situation without much difficulty. It is also important to consider that in the PRC the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Armed Police (PAP), as well as a number of less well defined paramilitary and security organizations, owe their loyalty and their position not to the state, or the people, but to the Party. Ultimately the fate of the military in China is tied to the fate of the CCP and at present there is no indication that the PLA, PAP or other security outfits would turn on their masters. They are too inter-linked and inter-dependent, although recent discussions regarding the political role of the military in China does suggest this might change in the longer term (Carter, 2012).

The penultimate point to consider for general explanations for the lack of protests are the quirks in how the legitimacy of the current CCP regime is perceived by the Chinese people. Bruce Gilley and Heike Holbig highlight that the Chinese population distinguish between central and local leadership when it comes to questions of legitimacy and the right to rule (Gilley and Holbig, 2009; Holbig and Gilley, 2010). Overall the central leadership is perceived as working hard in the interests of the people, challenging corruption and successfully delivering economic growth. In contrast the local level of government is seen as venal, corrupt and tends to abuse its power. This is not unique to the current time period with the earlier Mao period and even dynastic regimes subject to the same dual perception. The explanation for this might include a discussion of the Confucian foundations of governance in China or the distances involved in governing such a large and diverse nation. In both senses the local is closer and more easily challenged than the centre. The significance, however, is that protest in China also reflects this tendency.

As noted, China is not a land without protest. The PRC stopped publishing so-called 'mass incidents' in the mid-2000s but it is estimated that anything up to 90,000 incidents occur a year (Swartz, 2011). These can take the form of city wide protests as seen in the anti-PX campaign Ningbo in early November 2012, to smaller but no less dramatic protests focusing on a particular village, Wukan in late 2011 for example. What is important is that protests in China have not been national in nature since 1989. When citizens of the PRC take issue with their government it appears to be at the local level rather than the system as a whole. The central government is something far away and high above the fray of local government and the conflicts which unfold. Rather than protest against the central government the typical Chinese citizen appears more likely to appeal to the centre; replicating a tradition of petitioning an elite still held to the Confucian ideal of being a benevolent and morally higher authority in government.

The final area of note is that China's demography is fundamentally different to that of the nations which experienced the Arab Spring. Unlike Egypt or Tunisia for example China's youthful bulge of the 1950s/60s has been mitigated by various circumstances; famine in the late 1950s, subsequent population controls in the 1970s and the strict one child policy of the 1980s onwards. What this means is that whilst 20–30 year olds make up a significant proportion of the population they do not

outweigh other groups. There is a similar proportion of 40–50+ year olds. Due to population policy the trend will be for China's population to, proportionally, get progressively older before evening out overall in approximately 90 years' time (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, 2011). Officially at least China's population has also not been subjected to the same degree of unemployment over the last decade. The figure reported to the World Bank is in the region of 4 per cent (World-Bank, 2012). There are serious concerns about the accuracy of these figures (Solinger, 2001) but an important point to consider, and which will be developed further in the discussion which follows, is that the make-up of China's unemployed population is different. Rather than the young facing the most significant hardships in finding stable, long term employment, or any employment at all, it is the older generation who have been subject to greatest hardships since the force of the market was unleashed in the PRC.

Alternative View: *Dibao* as Social Control Mechanism

This chapter will add another aspect to the explanation as to why the Arab Spring did not transfer; that the CCP successfully co-opted one of the groups likely to form a core in any protest against the current regime, the so-called new poor. This group was made up of the losers in the reform process, especially workers and their families who were initially laid off and then made unemployed by their state owned enterprises. Whilst this process began in the early to mid-1990s it accelerated towards the end of the decade and continued into the 2000s. Estimates, based on information made available by the state, at the number who found their circumstances change from in work to laid-off/ unemployed between 1996 and 2001 are as high as 46 million (Solinger, 2010). Dealing with this group was achieved through the implementation and subsequent development of the MLG system in the 1990s.

The MLG system is a means tested programme of social assistance which provides recipients with a guaranteed minimum income. Initially an urban-only programme it emerged in 1993 in the city of Shanghai. In the years which followed a number of other cities implemented their own MLG systems under the guidance and encouragement of the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA). By 1996 the central leadership began to pay attention to the possibilities of the MLG and its national adoption was worked into long-term policy plans (National People's Congress, 1998). In 1997 the MLG was implemented nationally and after two years of extensive efforts by the MCA, and a set of State Council regulations

for the system, in late 1999 national implementation was announced as having been achieved (State Council, 1997; State Council, 1999).

Having achieved national implementation the PRC government did not ignore social assistance but continued to adapt the policy to suit their particular needs. For example in 1999 a blanket 30 per cent increase in the MLG, amongst other programmes, was ordered in the run-up to the 50th anniversary of the PRC (Ministry of Finance, 2000). As part of a concerted effort by Zhu Rongji in reforming the state owned sector between 2001 and 2003 the programme was expanded massively nationwide to include approximately 20 million new recipients (Hammond, 2010; Hammond, 2011a; Hammond, 2011b). In 2007, 2008 and in 2011 the central government has intervened in the running of the programme to ensure it responded to price increases in basic foodstuffs (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2007; Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Finance, 2008; Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2011). The MLG has, therefore, very clearly been used as a tool by the central government in order to facilitate wider policy goals and, arguably, maintain social stability. In 2007 the central government implemented a rural MLG programme which operates in a similar manner to the urban programme.

[insert Figure 9.1 near here]

Figure 9.1 Average MLG level and subsidy by year

Source: Dibao-Online, 2012; MCA-Online, 2012

The MLG operates as a local level programme which is administered and funded by the provincial and sub-provincial units of China's government. An MLG line is set by the People's Government in consultation with civil affairs, statistics, pricing and finance departments. The actual mechanics of determining this line is still a topic of discussion by the government 15 years after the programme was first implemented nationally (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2011). In order to receive the subsidy a household must apply to their local community office and demonstrate, through application forms, inspections, interviews and public vetting, that their income falls below the local MLG line. If it does, then the household is entitled to a monthly payment which tops up their income to the minimum livelihood as set by the MLG line (State Council, 1997, State Council, 1999). In practice, and as Figure 9.1 shows, this means that the amount received by recipients is not equivalent to the MLG line.

How does this relate to the lack of an Arab Spring type uprising in the PRC during early 2011?

The argument which follows draws on the work of Solinger who powerfully and consistently argues that the MLG has been used by the state as a means to keep a particular group of people, possibly even a class, in a permanent state of socio-political limbo (Solinger, 2010; Solinger, 2011a; Solinger, 2011b; Solinger, 2012; Solinger and Hu, 2012). This grouping is not so impoverished that they are motivated to protest or stand up against the state but neither are they empowered by the state's subsidies. Rather they exist in a perpetual grey area of hardship, misery and resignation; hoping for better but too weak or ashamed to demand it.

The group who are most likely to bear a grudge against the workings of the market and the state which unleashed these forces on their work forces are those made unemployed, then deemed unemployable and subsequently bought off with a guarantee of a minimum standard of living. It is not the youth of China which has lost out most in the last 20 years but the poor pensioner, the unemployable *xiagang*² worker, the family with a sick or disabled loved one. This group would have most likely responded to the call of 'We want food, we want work, we want housing, we want fairness' as detailed in the February 2011 calls to protest in China (Chang, 2011). It is also this group which is sated by a hand-out but unwilling or unable to demand more or better from their government and their nation (Solinger, 2011a; Solinger, 2011b; Solinger, 2012, Solinger and Hu, 2012).³ To a degree the so-called *dibaohu* are exactly those who might have answered the call to demand better from an uncaring government but their demands were already met and so rather than the beginnings of a protest movement Wangfujing and other areas across China instead witnessed a successful security crackdown.

This argument depends on a number of different strands holding up. These are briefly how government rhetoric and justification regarding the policy articulates its goals and objectives; the composition of *dibao* recipients and whether this reflects the likely groups who were disengaged from

² The *xiagang* are workers who were laid off by their work unit. While they no longer work they maintain a link with the work unit and might receive payments through the link (see for example Lee, 2000).

³ This ambiguous position of acceptance, resignation and the desire for better was found in my own small number of interviews with *dibaohu* in Anqing, Anhui province during 2006.

the workforce so abruptly in the 1990s and 2000s; and an assessment of how the MLG has been used to pre-emptively head off possible problems throughout its existence.

The rhetoric and justification surrounding the MLG has, for the most part, consistently followed the changes in CCP ideology and government policy from its initial emergence through to the 2010s. In the early to mid-1990s the MLG was closely tied by Ministers and other officials to the key overarching policy principles of reform and opening. In the early 2000s this changed and the importance of the three represents, Jiang Zemin's theoretical contribution, became prominent although this tended to feel more forced than genuine. With the transition to Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao's leadership the importance of the MLG to maintaining a harmonious society and scientific development have emerged in documents on the programme. This is to be expected. When discussing so-called speech spaces in the 1990s, Yan Jiaqi emphasizes that the details of policy, how it is discussed and presented, are constrained by the utterances of leaders further up the chain of command (Yan, 1995). Essentially, if a policy is to appear and to maintain legitimacy in the Chinese political system, it needs to be presented as fitting within whatever the particular limits that have been set by the hierarchy of party leaders and state representatives. This does lead to the situation where political and policy documents in the PRC tend to appear formulaic and limited but it is an important exercise in maintaining the place of a programme within what is a changing ideological environment.

The backing for the MLG went beyond what might be expected, based on speech spaces and associated rhetoric, in the support the programme received from certain officials. From very early on the MLG was presented as a programme which would enable the government and, more significantly, the Party to show their care for the people. In speeches to Ministry of Civil Affairs officials the Minister at the time, Duoji Cairang, stated that: 'this work [the MLG] reflects the Party's and government's care for the masses and the superiority of the socialist system' (Duoji, 1998a, p. 29). He also made the argument that:

Carrying out the urban resident MLG line system is important to both our nation and to guaranteeing human rights, because the right to life and to development are the most basic human rights. Carrying out the MLG is a major initiative for guaranteeing the

right to live, it will have extensive and far reaching impacts both internationally and domestically. (Duoji, 1998b, p. 33)

Officials, and Duoji in particular, also consistently tied the MLG to the principle of maintaining social stability (*baochi shehui wending*) whenever discussing the programme (Duoji, 1995, 1998b). Social stability as a concept refers in large part to avoiding protests and mass incidents. It is a key concern of the Chinese state and informs a great deal of policy decisions. What this evidence shows is that although the MLG fits with the general expectations of narrow speech spaces within the PRC it was also explicitly presented as a means to maintain social control and to establish/consolidate the legitimacy of the system led by the CCP.

The actual composition of *dibao* recipients is important when suggesting that the programme has essentially captured a potentially dissatisfied portion of the population. Based on the understanding that the MLG has become a programme to capture and pacify those who have lost out from the reform process, we would expect this composition to include the unemployed (official and unofficial), the elderly/pensioners who are not collapsed into the traditional ‘Three Nos’⁴ category (a category those without carers would have fallen into) to reflect poverty brought about by illness and lack of pensions, and also potentially flexible or casual workers which, as Solinger and Hu argue, is often the area of the economy that those expelled from the state-owned sector find themselves working in (Solinger, 2012; Solinger and Hu, 2012). If the argument that the MLG as a programme serves a purpose by capturing and pacifying these groups is to hold then these groups should make a significant portion of the make-up of MLG recipients. It should be noted that the data here is limited and does not include a break down by age brackets which would help to support, or dispel, the case being made. With this in mind the following can be drawn from the available data pulled from the first quarter of 2011, the closest information to the call to protest.

[insert Figure 9.2near here]

⁴ The ‘Three Nos’, or ‘Three Withouts’, refers to the traditional categorization of social assistance recipients who had to demonstrate they fell into one of categories covered in order to receive support. These categories were: no work ability, no income, no carer or guardian.

Figure 9.2 Percentage of total MLG recipients, first quarter 2011

Source: MCA-Online, 2012

In total 23.054 million individuals claimed the MLG when the first quarterly report was made in 2011. What is apparent from Figure 9.2 is that the numbers which fall into categories which might be defined as fitting the requirements outlined above are significant. Taken all together, the elderly, flexibly employed and the two unemployed categories account for 16.7 million people and 72.3 per cent of the total MLG recipients. The Three No's (those without income, work ability or a carer/guardian), the disabled, and students in school have been ruled out because they do not fit as potential protesters as detailed above. The incumbent grouping was ruled out because it is not defined in any way to make it clear what this might include.

There are a number of flaws in this approach which should be outlined. First, the splitting of different categories in the numbers above is arguably crude and it is needs to be acknowledged that there is no reason why an individual or family supporting an individual categorized as one of the Three No's or a disabled individual who has had their employment opportunities limited due to reforms would not be willing to protest against the status-quo. Second, it is not ideal that particular categories are ruled out due to being vague in their definitions but arguably this is better than including a category which could influence the conclusions drawn. Third, the use of this data and the inferences that can be drawn from it are not conclusive and would need to be explored more fully if more comprehensive data became available.

Whilst acknowledging the flaws in this approach what can be taken is that the MLG does in large part provide for those who can be considered to have been losers in the reform process. It would be useful to have access to age data and more clearly defined categories than exist at the moment. But for a snapshot of the composition of the MLG at this time the information available is invaluable and does allow a conclusion of sorts: that the MLG as a tool for capturing and ideally pacifying individuals was working in 2011.

[insert Figure 9.3 near here]

Figure 9.3 Proportion of funding by origin, 1998 – 2007

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Finance, 2005; MCA-Online, 2012

The final point to discuss is how MLG policy responses suggest the government was thinking of using the programme to head off potential social instability. As has been briefly alluded to in the discussion above, the MLG has been subject to central government interventions since it was rolled out as a national programme; this is in spite of the fact that it was and has remained a locally administered and funded programme on paper. The most significant intervention has been the on-going subsidization of the MLG. Since 1999 the central government has shored up the MLG by steadily increasing its subsidies to areas which were incapable of financing the programme effectively, as Figure 9.3 above illustrates. In 1999 the central government also intervened in an overtly political move when the MLG and other social policy subsidies were increased by 30 per cent in the run up to the 50th anniversary of the PRC (Ministry of Finance, 2000). This is a clear example of using a social assistance policy as a means to build legitimacy, regime satisfaction and placate possible anger in the run up to a highly sensitive time for the CCP. Protest during the 50th anniversary would have been embarrassing for China's leaders.

Between 2001 and 2003 the MLG was again used as a means to provide some form of guaranteed income to the laid off workers which it was no longer desirable to sustain through their old enterprises. Instead, through a mass mobilization campaign orchestrated by Premier Zhu Rongji and backed with guarantees of long term funding, 20 million people were channelled onto the MLG. It would have been politically unacceptable to leave these former workers, the champions of the Maoist era revolutionary idyll to fend for themselves but it was equally impossible to simply leave them burdening a struggling state sector as it reformed. The MLG provided a way out which was acceptable to policy makers and succeeded in placating the workers disappointments (Hammond, 2010; Hammond, 2011a; Hammond, 2011b).

In 2007 and 2008, with food prices rising globally, China experienced severe inflation in basic foodstuffs which was exacerbated by problems in the production of pork. The central government again intervened to head off increasing agitation regarding the price of foods by ordering a series of blanket national level increases in the level of the MLG. These increases corresponded with the increases in the prices of pork and were again backed by central funding (Ministry of Civil Affairs and Ministry of Finance, 2008). Finally, in 2011 the central government demanded that the localities do a better job of

responding to price changes in a document which, for the first time, detailed explicitly the methods local government should use to calculate the MLG line and subsequent adjustments (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2011).

These interventions in the MLG reflect a long standing recognition by the Chinese government that in order to head off protest and potential rebellion the people's basic needs should be catered to. Whilst interviewing a number of researchers in Beijing in the mid-2000s, who had close ties to the local and national government, it was clearly stated that the MLG serves the Party because a citizen who has food, clothes and a roof over their head does not rebel. A Department Head in the MCA also noted that the MLG was popular with local leaders because it provided a means to reduce local mass incidents. It seems that throughout the 1990s and 2000s the central government has kept this in mind whilst adjusting and adapting the MLG to serve its purposes.

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that an additional factor needs to be added to the current set of reasons which explain China's lack of revolt following the upheavals of the Arab Spring. This is that the Chinese government has successfully used the MLG policy as a means to capture and pacify a potentially angry and rebellious portion of the population. This chapter has used the original justification and rhetoric surrounding the programme, the composition of MLG recipients and the central government interventions in the programme to demonstrate this position.

What this chapter suggests is that authoritarian regimes can use social assistance policy to shore up their regimes, especially when going through the significant transformations the transition to capitalism requires. Whilst the PRC and the CCP may be authoritarian, and they may be brutal, they know their history. The collapse of previous regimes in China has always been brought about from the bottom up, by the hungry, the angry and the dispossessed. The CCP has shown an awareness of this and by ensuring that those who have lost most to the revolution of the last 30 years are kept fed, clothed and housed, no matter how basically, they are less likely to question the legitimacy of their rulers in Beijing.

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